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AUTHOR Zima, William J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The authors of this report were responsible for developing a new course in basic news reporting at the University of Iowa. In the report they discuss a breakdown of the news gathering process and the conceptual plan that resulted from the breakdown, teaching objectives and strategies, and specific methods used to implement the strategies. Students were given assignments based on the authors' conception of the process of news reporting: (1) identifying information sources; (2) contacting sources; (3) eliciting information from them; (4) processing the information into print or broadcast media; and (5) exposing the information to the general public. (RN)

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A DESIGN FOR A BASIC NEWS REPORTING COURSE

(c) 1973

by

William J. Zima,
Assistant Professor

Joseph R. Ascroft,
Assistant Professor

Charles C. Self,
Instructor

School of Journalism
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Ia. 52242

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CS 200 763

A DESIGN FOR A BASIC NEWS REPORTING COURSE (c) 1973

by William J. Zima, Joseph R. Ascroft, Charles C. Self,
School of Journalism, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Ia. 52242

The authors were given the task of developing a basic news reporting course for the newly instituted news editorial program at the University of Iowa. The course was to be the first of a sequence of three available to students interested in becoming professional newsmen and newswomen.

It was to be offered concurrently with foundations courses in media systems, law, history, media economics and technology, and theory.

The course, called News Gathering and News Writing, was designed to introduce the student to the entire process of news reporting and to provide him with principles upon which he could build throughout the rest of his work at the University of Iowa and throughout his career as a professional news person. The student's laboratory work would be followed by courses in News Processing and in Reporting of Public Affairs.

We saw an additional function in the first course of relating the material being studied in the foundations courses to the pragmatic work of producing professional-quality news products.

To accomplish these purposes, we had to deal with the process of news reporting conceptually, before we could implement it operationally. We had to develop a framework, and we had to use terms that would not apply only to one mass medium operation, such as a newspaper, but that would apply to any medium.

We broke down the news reporting process into constituent parts, examined the parts for basic characteristics or principles, and categorized the

parts into a framework upon which to build teaching/learning strategies. This was also done with the sources of news and information the reporter uses.

We found that the process of news reporting may be thought of as (1) identifying news and information sources, (2) contacting these sources, (3) "liberating" news and information from them, (4) processing this news and information into media-appropriate forms (e.g., for print or broadcast), and, finally, (5) exposing the news to the general public.

Out of the breakdown and analysis came a concept of the news reporting process that could be generalized for the journalistic mass media, whether newspaper, periodical or broadcast.

Once the concept had been established and the principles we were trying to describe for the student determined, we sought specific teaching strategies that would provide maximum opportunity for the student to develop these concepts within himself.

We established a newsroom atmosphere in which students could develop media-appropriate behaviors. We also provided our students with opportunities to participate in live news situations in cooperation with local newspapers and other news agencies within the framework of the course.

These approaches were used to develop within the student systematic behaviors appropriate not only to news reporting but to all meaningful activities in life. The abstracted principles of research, analysis, and communication effective in news operations are the same ones required in the successful completion of most other tasks the student may face.

We have found that the discipline of preparing and planning are difficult propositions for many students to assimilate. Students tend to go for short-

cuts and the easiest way through a task. The result is usually shallow, superficial reporting of news. A similar result occurs in any endeavor that is approached in this minimal fashion. Hence, the stress on thoroughness in planning and on preparation.

Our analysis of the reporting process also contributed to a decision to make news gathering the main emphasis of the course. We tried to inclucate the student with the discipline of planning and digging to give him something substantial to report to his readers.

We are aware that many news reporting programs deal with this process in some systematic way. What we are discussing here is a system or design that we have found to be highly effective for our own particular laboratory approach to education in journalistic techniques. We feel it may have use for others involved in the same kind of activity.

In the balance of this paper, we will discuss in greater detail (1) our breakdown of the news reporting process and the conceptual plan that resulted from the breakdown, (2) our teaching objectives and consequent strategies, and (3) the specific methods by which we attempted to implement these strategies.

CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The process of news reporting (as noted on Page 2) may be divided into identifying, contacting and "liberating" news from sources, processing the news into media forms, and then exposing the news to the public.

What are news sources? We identified three primary types: stored sources, personal sources, and environmental sources.

Stored sources are sources of reportable information available to or

accessible to a seeker of information whenever he wants them. The most common are documents, audio/video tapes, memory banks, films, pictures, books, magazines, clippings, newspapers, references, and similar forms.

Personal sources are, quite simply, people. They must first be identified. Even then they are not usually available on command, but must be contacted and interacted with. They include such persons as the principals and protagonists, witnesses or observers, experts and advisers, and leaders or makers of opinion about newsworthy events or issues. They may also include average citizens who comment about news events or issues.

Environmental sources are perceivable, non-verbal[1] cues about news events or issues. They may be identified along the dimensions of the physical, social and psychological characteristics of the news event or issue.

The purpose of identifying and contacting such sources is for backgrounding, for verifying information from other sources, and for generating new forms of information by reconstitution, recombination, reinterpretation, and modification of their contents.

Taken together, these elements provide three major sources of newsworthy material, which can be tapped singly, in pairs, or in three forms at once. In most cases, two or three sources provide cross checks in the news reporting process.

The process of news reporting, therefore, deals with the most effective and viable ways of "mining" these sources of information with a view to publishing this information in a newspaper or a magazine or broadcasting it

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[1]We use this term advisedly realizing that meaning may be derived for word and non-word cues in similar ways.

over radio or TV for public consumption.

The principal steps of this process for the reporter are those connected with processing the information into media-appropriate forms. The reporter is concerned with gathering the news, structuring it in some meaningful form, and styling it into an intelligible, comprehensive and interesting story. He may or may not be involved in the initial identification of a newsworthy source or with the final act of editing and publishing or broadcasting processed news, but he is responsible for whatever goes on between these two points. These, then, are the three parts of the process dealt with specifically in this course.

These behaviors are fundamental to any kind of research and reporting process and basic to any scientific or intellectual activity.

We analyzed and categorized the behaviors involved in the reporting process this way:

News Gathering involves (1) the identification of the problem or issue in the news situation, (2) the asking of investigative questions aimed at exposing the nature, the character, the extent, and the importance of the problem or issue, with the use of the five-W questions as guides, (3) the selecting and sampling of the sources most likely to provide useful answers and explanations, and (4) the recording of these answers in a form which will allow systematic analysis. Verifying the accuracy of the material "mined" takes place both at the time the material is gathered and again when the material is structured.

News Structuring involves (1) reducing the bulk of the recorded information into manageable proportions, (2) classifying the information in degrees of importance, (3) rechecking the reliability and validity of the information as necessary while taking into account the legal ramifications of the information (e.g., guarding against libel), and (4) ordering the categorized pieces of information into some appropriate form for effective communication of the information. The inverted pyramid is a basic organizational form, but features, backgrounders and broadcast items, and other journalistic forms are discussed.

News Styling involves writing and reporter-editing the material now structured for the appropriate outlet and includes (1) the designing of the lead and the body of the story, (2) the encoding of the story in words, diagrams, or pictures, and (3) the rewriting and editing of the story into intelligible, comprehensive and interesting forms suitable for the designated medium.

In our view the ultimate objective of all reporters is to inform their publics on the issues and events as comprehensively, as honestly, as fairly, and as interestingly as possible. Each of the behaviors under the categorization and analysis of the news process is meant to induce investigative depth in the work of the student. It is also meant to facilitate systematic thinking throughout the process.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

In our overview, we listed five steps in the news process (Page 2): identifying sources, contacting the sources, freeing or taking news material from the sources and converting it into media forms, processing and packaging the forms, and, finally, publishing or broadcasting the packages to the public. The first three steps are handled by the reporter. The last two steps usually are handled by editors or their broadcast equivalents.

The objectives of the course became the providing of activities that would facilitate development of those behaviors that our analysis of the news process showed to be common to experienced reporters and researchers engaged in the first three steps. The last two steps were to be dealt with in the second course in the news editorial sequence, News Processing. The third course in the sequence would intensively develop the principles established in this first course. Other courses would allow the student to expand on the principles of the first course or specialize in particular media with the principles of the first course as a foundation.

As noted and outlined on Page 4 and in the accompanying Schematic or Overview of the course (Page 7), the reporter must deal with three kinds of sources. We felt that the behaviors relative to each of the sources merited

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The Schematic or Overview

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The Process of News Reporting / The Sources of News Generation	NEWS GATHERING 1. Issue, problem to be reported 2. Questions to be asked 3. Sources to be used 4. Recording of data	NEWS STRUCTURING 1. Reduction of gathered information 2. Verifying, checking the information 3. Ordering the information into structure	NEWS STYLING 1. Story treatment 2. Story writing or encoding 3. Story editing	TIE-IN
STORED SOURCES (printed, electronic) 1. Newsroom references 2. General library references 3. Specialized sources	Types of Assignments Basic references Library references Special sources Question framing Source selection Note-taking	Checking your facts Data reducing, classifying Structuring: inverted pyramid and other styles Gap-detecting/filling	Writing the news story/ styles Major Profile Statistical Profile Good Writing Rewriting	Tie-in Assign.
PERSONAL SOURCES 1. Principals, protagonists 2. Witnesses, observers 3. Experts, advisers 4. Opinion leaders, Public	Types of Assignments Basics of interviewing/ techniques In-class interviews Interview critiques Note-taking Out-class interviews	Cross-checking your facts Structuring quotes/documentary sources Restructuring Profiles	Covering Iowa City Schools Rewriting Profiles Writing Backgrounder	Tie-in Assign.
ENVIRONMENTAL SOURCES 1. Physical (artifacts, time, space) 2. Social (relationships) 3. Psychological (perceptions)	Types of Assignments Inference/Observation exercises Non-verbal clues Gathering information from Environment Interview and non-verbal	Review structuring Structure non-verbals Checking your observations.	Cover stories for campus daily Cover city hall Rewriting Broadcast Style	Tie-in Assign.
TYING-IN ASSIGNMENTS	Pay CATV Poll Cover City Council	Covering District Court Trial	Special Section for Campus Daily Covering Stories for City Daily	Tie-in Finals

individual attention, and activities had to be designed to allow the student to develop behaviors sufficient to work effectively with each kind of source.

The result was a three-by-three table of activities (see Schematic, Page 7) formulated to give the student specific opportunities to work with each kind of source and each step of the news reporting process: gathering, structuring and styling. The Schematic was expanded to a four-by-four dimension to permit assignments which would tie the entire process together and to permit the student to engage in all the activities simultaneously. The Schematic of teaching objectives was a statement of general behaviors we hoped to encourage the students to develop. For each cell in the Schematic, specific behaviors were outlined.

The cells (see Schematic) included, as noted, news gathering, news structuring and news styling for each of the types of sources with which the reporter would work: stored, personal, and environmental. The tie-in assignments were scheduled for each process separately and then for all the processes collectively.

For example, the specific behaviors in the first cell (news gathering-stored sources), included those behaviors we found common to reporters and researchers gathering information. They are (see Page 5) identifying the problem or issue in the news situation, asking investigative questions, selecting and sampling useful sources, recording answers in useful forms and checking the accuracy of the material gathered. These same specific behaviors were encouraged in each additional news gathering cell (personal and environmental sources) when we got to them.

When we moved to each of the next steps in the reporting process, news structuring and news styling, we again set as teaching objectives the specific

behaviors we analyzed for each of them and related them to stored, personal and environmental sources. For example, news structuring behaviors include reduction, classification, verification and organization, and news styling behaviors included setting tone, blending words and illustrations, and editing.

We chose to move left to right and top to bottom through the Schematic because our analysis of the news process as it is practiced led us to believe that this is the most useful order to approach news problems. We found that reporters generally begin with stored sources because they are available on command and consequently reliably available. They provide a helpful and usually almost essential base for further data gathering. Personal sources seem to be used next because they establish reporter credibility and usually represent knowledgeable data.[2] The environmental sources usually are considered last, apparently because they do not establish as much credibility for the reporter and represent only one man's view of a news situation. They seemed to be underused and usually only supplement other data, but perhaps with good cause in many news situations.

The individual cells in the Schematic represented objectives for the teaching and assignment activities. However, each cell was considered cumulative. If the class session was scheduled to deal with news gathering-personal sources, the students were expected also to gather from stored sources as needed.

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[2] In several of the approaches that we examined before undertaking the design, we noted that the personal sources or human source and the interview are placed first in the sources category. Every approach includes backgrounding, but backgrounding almost always appears to be subordinated to the interview. We felt that the stress should be on preparation and planning and the way to accomplish this is through consulting first the stored sources.

Once the teaching objectives had been determined, specific teaching strategies had to be worked out to implement the objectives determined through the conceptual plan. It was decided early that the approach would be a combination of simulation or practice techniques, short explanation and discussion segments, textbook and handout readings, work assignments, quizzes and tests.

The fundamental approach would be one of simulation or practice. From the first minute of the first class session, we attempted to create a newsroom atmosphere. Through deadline pressures, multiple assignments, publication or broadcast requirements, and heavy editing and critiquing by the instructors, we tried to give the students a simulated newsroom operation. The idea was to create stories that would be publishable (or would be airworthy) for the news editors (the instructors). Handouts usually accompanied assignments and short (usually less than 20 minutes) explanations and discussions of major problems encountered in the assignments took place before and after the assignments.

Grades were based on the assignments and quizzes over the three areas of required reading: daily newspapers, textbooks by Curtis MacDougall (Interpretative Reporting), David L. Grey (The Writing Process) and Philip Meyer (Precision Journalism), and the handouts distributed with the discussions and assignments.

The specific assignments and techniques used to accomplish the objectives are discussed in the final section of this paper.

Let it suffice to say here that from two to four class sessions were assigned to each cell in the Schematic. More than 30 assignments and 15 quizzes were given the students and more than 40 handouts on the topics listed were distributed.

IMPLEMENTATION

This section will describe the implementation of the conceptual plan we worked out for the day-to-day operation of the class. Each assignment or quiz was designed to help accomplish the teaching objectives described above.

In the description that follows, we will first expand on our notions about each of the sources and about each of the processes of reporting and then describe a sampling of the handouts and assignments we used in achieving the objectives.

Stored Sources

As we have pointed out, this refers to news and information that can be found not only in printed form but also in electronic form. Though print is most prevalent currently, the other looms in the offing in awesome contour. Computer storage, for instance, has already entered the newspaper through photocomposition, optical scanners and video display terminals. Soon it will enter the morgue and the newspaper library.

We have classified stored facts into three general types. They are (1) basic newsroom references, (2) general library references, and (3) specialized references and libraries.

Basic newsroom references include the dictionary, the almanac or yearbook, the atlas or maps, the directories, such as the phone book and the city directory, the clipping files or morgue, the back copies of the publication, a set of encyclopedia, and, finally, the individual set of references that reporters establish for themselves in a filing cabinet or in their desk drawer.

The general library stored sources include the basic newsroom refer-

ences in elaborated form as well as additional information stored in books, on film and tape. For instance, the general library has a variety of the following:

1. Encyclopedias, such as Collier's, Compton's, Britannica, Americana, etc.

2. Indexes to magazine and newspaper articles of current interest, such as Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Business Periodicals Index, Index to Legal Periodicals, New York Times Index, etc.

3. Magazines, newspapers and periodicals themselves or versions stored on film or tape.

4. Yearbooks, almanacs, handbooks and statistical sources, such as World Almanac, Facts on File, Statesman's Year Book, Statistical Abstract of the United States, Agricultural Statistics, United Nations Demographic Yearbook, etc.

5. Book reviews that have appeared in periodicals, scholarly journals, trade publications, and newspapers, including the indexes for these: Book Review Digest and the Book Review Index.

6. Books on virtually any subject, catalogued on cards by topic, by author and by title.

7. Documents of the federal government as well as the state and local government, such as Census Reports, State Code and local ordinances. Indexes to these are also available in the library.

8. Biographical information, such as the Dictionary of American Biography, Who's Who in America, and Current Biography as well as a number of individual biographies in separate books.

9. Vertical files containing localized and specialized information, such as city and county historical records and local publications.

10. Replication of some of the above printed sources on film and tape, such as back copies of the local newspaper, copies of motion pictures, audio tapes of broadcasts or speeches, etc.

Specialized references include information and news found in governmental, educational and social institutions, specialized libraries, museums and exhibits and data banked information.

Records, directories, reports, statistical compilations and other documents are found at the city hall, county building, lower and higher courts, statehouse, federal building, schools and social agencies. Most of this information and news is in printed form at the moment, but more and more of it will be placed into computer storage.

Specialized libraries include the law library, medical and dental libraries and science libraries. In addition to these, there are museums where paintings, sculpture and other works of art are displayed and stored, where the artifacts of history are shown and stored, or where other specialties are housed.

The advance of memory banks and computer storage suggests that journalism students become familiar with storage systems and with computers.

Personal Sources

The person, the human source, joins the stored source as another instrument of the news reporting process. Human sources function in the reporting process as references and backgrounders, as verifiers of certain information or situations and as the main actors in news situations. Frequently, the human source is all three.

The principals and protagonists are the prime sources of what happened or about the issue in question. They not only are the repositories of

the experience that occurred, and thus the storers of information, but they may also be the experts in the situation. They are the prominent persons, the VIPs, the officials, the elite, the newsmakers, the heroes. They are also the villains and the scoundrels in the situation, the antagonists, the contenders and the main reactors. They are the victims or the injured in the particular situation or, by contrast, the beneficiaries, the winners, in the situation.

The secondary sources, the witnesses and observers, the sideline people, are those persons who saw what happened or heard what happened or were indirectly involved in what happened.

The experts and advisers are the human "libraries," who are well informed about aspects of what happened and have depth information in one or several areas that concern the news event or issue. The professional participates as the enlightener of the situation, the context setter or the explainer of the situation.

The fourth category of human sources embraces everyone else. The opinion leaders who have opinions about what occurred and who discuss them in an informed way are one part of this final group. The ordinary citizen is another. He may or may not have an opinion about the situation or he may adopt an opinion about the situation and can become a part of a general collection of opinions that indicate trends or percentages of views in one direction or another.

Environmental Sources

The environmental sources provide the backdrop or context for the news event or issue. We have categorized them as physical, social and psycho-

logical. They are generally dealt with in a descriptive way.

The physical characteristics may include the composition of the scene of a news event and may include the arrangement of material things, such as tables and chairs, books, colors and textures, etc., and their relationships, whether orderly or disorderly or some combination thereof. Time and space are involved.

The social aspect may include the way the principals in the event organize themselves in relationship to each other, or how a newsmaker arranges himself in relationship to physical components of his environment, or how the principal behaves in a social context.

The psychological aspect may include the dynamics of the situation, the behavioral manifestations, such as the tenseness displayed in some fashion, the levity shown in another situation, and so on.

News Gathering

As we have indicated in our conceptual model, the process of news reporting deals with the most effective and viable ways of "mining" the news sources with a view to publishing or broadcasting the result for public consumption.

The chief steps in the reporting process--as we have noted earlier--include the gathering of news and information from these sources, structuring it in a meaningful way and then writing it so that it will receive maximum interest from its intended recipients.

When we undertook the development of this course, we decided to stress news gathering and news structuring, rather than news writing. We wanted to see whether we could take the emphasis off the notion of "writing"

reporters and replace it with the notion of "thinking/digging" reporter. We felt that this proposition would pay off in students who learned the value of good preparation and good organization as basic to good news writing. If they learned how to dig for and assemble an important story from documentary, human and environmental sources, the writing would fall into place rather naturally.

We determined not to start the students off on simple news events--the two-car crash, the campus speech and the weekly meeting of the University Ecology Club--but to put them to work immediately "mining" facts from cold type and organizing these facts into efficient background reports.

This emphasis on gathering/structuring is carried through the course in various ways.

The news gathering process starts with problem identification and includes question framing, scurce sampling and selection, and data or fact collecting or recording.

Something occurs or manifests itself and the reporter becomes aware of it as a problem or issue. For instance, the city editor receives a tip, a person calls the reporter about something, or the reporter discovers something while surveying the scene of his regular assignment or beat.

The problem or issue, in turn, is fraught with questions. These questions set the direction for the reporter. They point him toward the sources--whether stored, personal or environmental--he needs to consult in order to get the information. Once he's at the source, questions help him determine what he should get and how much.

The reporter asks himself: "Where do I have to go to get what I need to know in order to understand the situation and to answer all the questions in connection with this situation?"

Once the reporter is at the source or sources, he again asks himself: "What questions do I ask of this source in order to get all that it has to offer in a minimum amount of time?"

We call question-framing systematic thinking because it helps the student, the reporter, organize and plan his news gathering quest.

In addition to planning through questions, we also discuss the nature of questions. We distinguish between the broad or low-yield question and the specific or high-yield question.[3] A sample of the former would be: "What effect will faculty unions have on the livelihood of professors?" A sample of the latter would be: "What is the average salary of an assistant professor who belongs to a faculty union at X University? What is the average salary of an assistant professor of Y University, where there is no faculty union?" And so on.

We include the Five-W Package in the discussion of question-framing as "one of the handiest thinking and research tools in formulating questions. Who, what, when, where and why help you check to see whether you have touched all bases. The five-W's keep you alert to all the possibilities in your research."

Source sampling and selection is premised on the fact that it's impossible to check out everything on a given issue or problem. Availability of sources and the deadline time factor force the reporter to make decisions on what he is going to get and in what time span. We suggest to students that they put down all the kinds of documentary material that would have a bearing on the questions they are seeking to answer. This means they have to have a good knowledge of reference material.

When human sources are involved, we urge the students to list all

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[3]The broad or low-yield question has value, too, particularly in the interview. This is explained to the student.

possible persons who would have knowledge of the particular situation, the principals, the experts, the observers, the pros and cons, etc. Then the students should determine which ones they can phone or interview in person. Having backgrounded themselves well, they select only those people who can come up with the answers they need. This also means they ask the kind of questions that bring high yields in the shortest possible time.

When dealing with the environment, students are told they need to understand those cues or elements in the scene that are observable and those that require inference. The student should be able to deal with the physical (artifacts, time, space), the social (relationships) and the psychological (perceptions).

Once the student has identified the problem, framed the questions, sampled and selected the sources, he has to record what he found in the sources. This, of course, means some form of note-taking or data recording. Note-taking is the commonest form, of course.

Systematic note-taking, we tell the students, is more than orderly note-taking. The system involves understanding what is read, heard and observed. We urge the students to not merely copy the words in some printed source, but to try to express in their own words what they read. The exception to this is when they want to use significant quotations.

We caution against taking too many notes and suggest that those reporters who take too many notes have not prepared themselves on what they want to find out. They did not plan ahead, in other words.

We tell them to make their notes readable: "If you use some form of abbreviation or shorthand, be sure you can translate it. This becomes critical when you take notes in interviews or at speeches. You can always go back to

the reading material, but you may not get a second chance with a human source."

We frown on trusting memory instead of note-taking, although we discuss interview situations where note-taking puts the interviewee on his guard or causes him a great deal of unease. But we caution the students to write down the information they get as soon as possible after such an interview.

Finally, we stress the need to have adequate writing material for note-taking. We also discuss the pluses and minuses of tape recording as a substitute for note-taking or as a supplement to note-taking.

A great deal of stress is placed on note-taking, with many of the assignments given orally. Repetitions are kept at a minimum in order to promote the habit of close listening.

A sampling of the assignments given under news gathering include the following:

Telephone Directory Assignment: On the first day of class students are given an assignment sheet which tells them they have one hour to locate a phone book and mine it for 15 different pieces of information. The sheet says:

> The Telephone Directory is a basic reference for the news gatherer. It's not only handy for telephone numbers and business firms but also for other city and--in our case--university information. What can you find in the Phone Book of Iowa City and nearby communities that will help you write news stories about campus and city events?

No other explanation is given, except that students are not to list merely 15 different phone numbers. The quick assignment, with minimum explanation and maximum execution, was designed to set the tone of the class.

Directory Quiz: The quick follow-up to the directory assignment is an oral quiz, with questions such as these:

You are doing a story about religious services in Iowa City. One piece of information you need is how many churches and denominations there are in Iowa City. No source has given you that information and you cannot contact anyone for the information. What is the answer? How did you find out?

Your city editor tells you to find out once and for all whether the University buys non-union lettuce. Whom would you ask and what is his or her phone number?

You are told that Plum Grove has been vandalized. What is it and where is it located?

Several coeds have reported receiving obscene telephone calls. You need a quick paragraph explaining what the law says about the penalty for such calls. Write the paragraph.

References in the Library: This handout is based on a guide compiled by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress and includes information in encyclopedias, magazines, newspaper articles, yearbooks, almanacs, statistical sources, books, documents of the federal government and biographical information.

Students are told to go to the library, familiarize themselves with the layout and examine some of the references because the next series of assignments will involve the fast use of the library.

Documentary Sources Quiz: Sample: Where would you find the answers to the following: How many teacher unions are there in the United States today? Answer: World Almanac, New York Times Index, Reader's Guide, Facts on File, Encyclopedia of Associations, etc. Upon what legal precedents was the 1972 ruling against the death penalty based? Answer: New York Times Index, Wall Street Journal Index, Index to Legal Periodicals, and Reader's Guide.

Library Research Exercise: "The question is the basic tool for digging out information. Questions are tied to whatever you do. They are your compass

and digging tool."

> Each of you is assigned a reference to consult at the Main Library. Your job is to describe on paper what is available in your reference and to provide three examples of material the news gatherer can use for backgrounding a story. Next, pose two questions in a news context that can be researched in your reference. Complete the assignment in 30 minutes.

The example given was:

> Let's say your reference is the Education Index. You study it and write a two-page description of what is available there. You list three examples. Now comes the question: "What do education experts say the ideal university classroom should be?" Research the topic and then compare it with a classroom in the Communications Center, say, Room 305 CC.

Question Framing Assignment: The students are divided into groups of four and told to discuss for 10 minutes the main situations and issues that appear to be of current interest to students. They are asked to list five possibilities and to frame at least 10 questions that get at the heart of the issue and to list as many documentary sources that will help them find the answers to the questions.

This example was given:

1. Issue

   Does boycotting lettuce help migrant workers?

2. Questions

   How many migrant workers are there in the United States today?
   How much lettuce is consumed in the United States today?

3. Sources

   How many migrant workers are there in the United States today?
   1973 World Almanac.
   Bureau of Labor Statistics Yearbook.

Source Sampling Assignment: Students are told to reform their groups

of four and to divide the references listed:

> Go to the libraries on campus and find out if the references you have listed are available. If they are, list the kinds of information that can be found in each reference and describe how useful that source can be for a reporter. Reformulate your questions so that you can answer them with specific information using the references you have found.

Note-Taking Handout: The handout begins by saying: "By now you've developed some style of taking notes. If the notes you take are useful, then you should not change your style. But if the yield from your note-taking isn't very high, then you should consider retooling this very important news gathering tool." This is followed by seven suggestions and explanations. Practice note-taking exercises are given.

Question Framing Is Systematic Thinking: This handout goes through a detailed explanation of where information gathering begins, a framework for pinpointing the problem or issue, the method for diagnosing, questioning and gathering information, and the value of broad and specific questions. Included in the discussion is the use of the Five-W Package.

Question Framing: An Illustration: This handout gives students an example of how an issue is carried through the process suggested in "Question Framing is Systematic Thinking." The issue is a phone call about a possible faculty union at the University of Iowa. This handout is followed by several question-framing exercises.

Use of Statistics in Documentary Research: Instructors discuss and illustrate central tendency and variancy, themes and trends and the nature of statistics. A length of wool yarn is used. Students guess at the length and the figures from these estimates are put into tables and statistical analyses made. This is followed up with an assignment called Mean, Median, Mode and Range. Students are required to calculate mean, median, mode and

range from data gathered from the class about such things as cigarette smoking, book reading, etc. The follow-up to this is another handout called Statistical Sources, which deals with publications issued by the Bureau of the Census.

Statistical/Documentary Profiles: This assignment requires the students to write a profile of their hometowns with only their experience, census statistics and documentary references as their sources.

Biographic Profile: This assignment takes students into biographic material and prepares them for live assignments later on. Students must prepare a profile of a state or national figure based on documentary material alone.

Write a Backgrounder: Samples of two backgrounders are given to the students to study. Then five current issues are dictated, including Watergate, fuel shortage, and devaluation of the dollar, and the students grouped around each of the issues with the assignment to write a four-page background story from documentary and statistical references.

The exercises and assignments dealing with human sources are handled in much the same way as the documentary sources. For example:

Basics of Interviewing: This handout covers the preparation necessary for the interview, the recording of notes on the interview, the interview itself, the wrap-up of the interview, and the follow-up, if necessary. Question framing is reviewed and discussed in relation to a live source. Several class demonstrations of interviewing are held.

In-Class Interviews: Students practice some of the techniques among themselves, then selected individuals (the city manager, for instance) are brought in for press conferences. Students compile questions and take turns asking them of the visitor. At the end of the session, the students write

a two-page story of the interview in 30 minutes. Meantime, the instructors discuss with the visitor his impressions of the interview and then a general class discussion is held.

Next, the students are divided into smaller groups and another visitor is brought in. One group of four students prepares for the interview, another group critiques the interview, a third group writes the interview and the fourth group critiques the write-up.

Out-Class Interviews: In these assignments, students are given an issue, for instance, the pay structure for university faculty, and each student is assigned to research the topic and then interview a J-School professor or other available professor on the topic.

This is followed by an assignment in which students do a profile of a university administrator. The assignment is in two parts. The first involves researching the person from available documents, clippings and other sources. From these, the student constructs a profile based only on documentary sources. At the same time, the students are required to hand in a set of questions for their in-person interview with the administrator. Along with this, they are told to bring in an example of a good profile that appeared in a printed publication, primarily a newspaper.

The profiles written[4] from documentary material are critiqued and graded and then students set up interviews by telephone with the campus official and with other persons who know him well. These included assistants, spouse, students and so on.

Students are also told to observe the administrator's office, his mannerisms and his actions. Principles of observing are discussed.

Armed with the documentary background, the students proceed to do what we called Major Profiles of university personages. When these are turned in,

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[4] Work on structuring/styling go on at the same time.

another critique is done and rewrites suggested, including call-backs with the persons being profiled. The rewrites complete the profile assignment

Exercises and assignments in observation involve the writing of descriptive pieces based on the examination of offices of professors in the J-School and covering a Professional Journalist Lecture, with the emphasis on a description of what went on rather than on what was said.

The Non-Verbal Assignment asked the students to "select one of the following offices (list given) in the J-School and write a two-page (double-spaced) description of the person based on the criteria below." The criteria included kinesics, physical characteristics, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts and environment. These are discussed in class in some detail.

One of the exercises in the observational work includes differentiating between inference and observation and this is done through a description of an apparent hold-up. Students answer questions relative to the hold-up and their answers reveal whether they are involved in observation or in inference.

A number of other aspects are dealt with in the exercises and assignments covering news gathering, but space limits the discussion here.

To review, news gathering starts with an issue to be reported and questions to be asked, and finishes with sources to be selected and information to be recorded, the collection of data process that takes in "mining", interviewing and observing.

News Structuring

This process consists of verifying or checking the gathered information, reducing the volume of recorded information into workable units, and structuring or organizing the material into useable form.

The emphasis here is on focusing the students' information on the key

issue in the story and then classifying their data according to how this material elucidates the central point.

We say that the reporter should be able to summarize the issue in one sentence. Then he should be able to go through his notes classifying and rank-numbering the supporting evidence, condensing and digesting several pieces of evidence into one or two significant pieces, earmarking the illustrative, anecdotal and descriptive material that will provide depth to a set of facts, and, finally, casting off the material that has the least bearing on the issue. The reducing, checking, ordering process occurs simultaneously. The need to be accurate in gathering material is stressed throughout the gathering assignments. In the structuring, special point is made to have students question their facts and to verify them in alternate sources; for instance, in several different references, or with a reference and a human source.

Helpful to the condensing or reducing process is the inverted pyramid style of news story organization. It provides the basic structure for ordering the data gathered. The students work through exercises which require them to sift through their material for duplication and irrelevance, exercises which require them to practice organizing their notes in various ways, numbering them and then outlining them by the numbered order, and, finally, exercises in which students work to spot weaknesses and gaps in their gathering of ordered information.

We urge the students to structure their story in such a way that their readers can move easily through the data collected and also can see the relationships between all the pieces of information in one reading.

Styles of structuring the body of the story are given. These are based on those defined in Curtis MacDougall's Interpretative Reporting. But the

students are told that the style chosen should best display their data and that they should not worry whether it is a spiral form or a block form or whatever.

Feature styles are also discussed, as well as the styles that have appeared in "new journalism" writing.

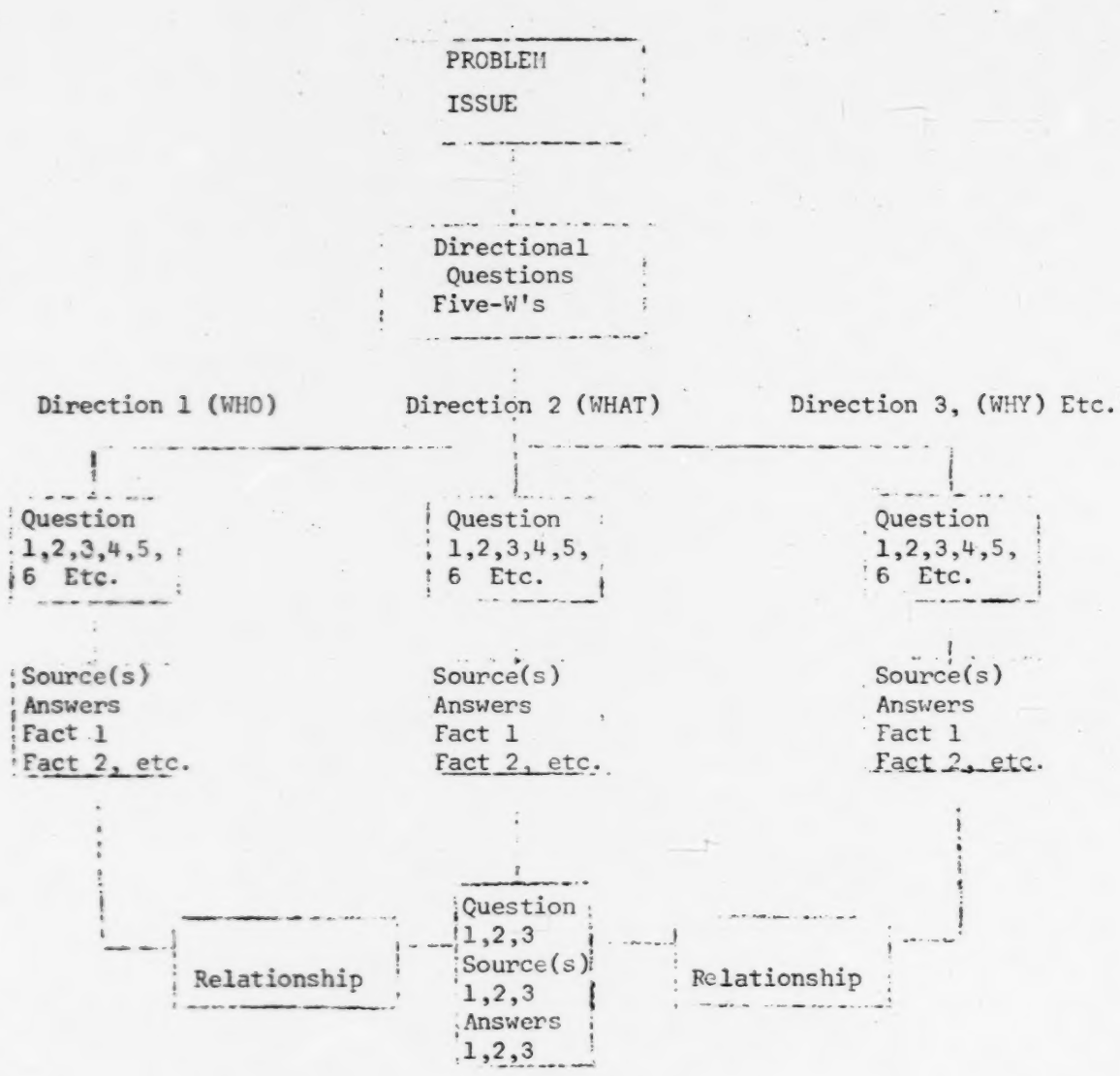
We urge the students not to become ruled by story patterns or by the language used in fleshing out the patterns. We tell them that the key to becoming and staying good reporters and to avoiding becoming hacks is to not let themselves become victims of repeating patterns of story structure. We emphasize that structure must always be used so that it will best help the reader to understand the facts being reported.

If students have difficulty in ordering their material, in analyzing their data and in spotting missing pieces of information, we discuss the use of the flow chart as a useful device. Flow-charting is diagraming or outlining a complicated process or activity so that intersections and branches help to simplify and clarify the process or the classification and ordering of the data. For an example of a flow chart that can be used to structure data or facts for a story see Flow-Chart Diagram on Page 28.

Gaps and holes in the collected data generally show up when the story is organized in outline form. The use of the Five-W Package is urged to help the student check all the phases of his story. The "why" in the five-W's is particularly stressed because in many stories this important component tends to be mishandled or ignored or superficially covered.

Assignments and exercises in structuring are tied closely to the news gathering work. Assignments for one are used in the other.

Checking Your Facts: This exercise deals with ways students can check



FLOW-CHART DIAGRAM

out information and stresses the need to be alert when taking down information, especially in the spelling of names and the recording of addresses.

The Inverted Pyramid Structure: This handout details the use of news story style, discussing the lead, the focal point of the basic news story, and the body, which expands and explains the elements in the lead. An illustration is included.

One illustration dealt with a city's rising cost of fire protection.

It was handled this way:

Issue: XYZ city's rising Fire Department costs.

Directional questions: Why are the costs rising?
What can be done about it?

Possible sources: Fire department reports, city financial reports, city budget, interviews with fire department chief, city manager, city finance officer, state reports of fire protection costs, fire insurance reports, rates and ratings, etc.

-- Data Collected:

What did it cost to provide fire protection in fiscal 1971-72? $1,365,406. What did it cost in fiscal 1972-73? $1,525,395. What caused the increase of $159,989? Salaries of firemen increased 5 per cent. New equipment worth $60,000 was purchased. Maintenance costs rose 3 per cent. Five more firemen were added to the staff of 142 firemen, etc. How do the fire costs of XYZ compare with ABC? Second highest in the state.

What can be done about the costs? City manager says tie them to assessed value of property at a rate of 60 cents per $100 of valuation. Example: Person owning a home assessed at $20,000 would pay a fee of about $120 for fire protection. When fire protection costs rise, fee must rise.

What does taxpayer get for his fee? Fire chief says lower insurance rate. In 1972 firemen saved more than 91 per cent of fire-threatened structures and contents. Firemen handled 2,000 fire calls in 1972, etc.

Structured outline:

Focus or lead: Fire protection in XYZ rose by $159,989 in fiscal 1972-73 because of pay increases to firemen, new equipment, higher costs of maintenance and the adding of more firemen to the department.

Tentative Outline:

I. Why are costs rising?

A. More people, more fires.

1. City population increases, more houses.
2. 2,000 fires in 1972; 1,750 in 1971
3. Types of fires.

B. More firemen save more property.

1. Reorganize stations to speed-up answering alarms, five men added.
2. 91 per cent of property saved in 1972· 80 per cent in 1971.
3. Lower insurance rate for property owners.

C. Breakdown of fire costs.

1. Five per cent salary increases.
2. New pumper cost $60,000.
3. Maintenance cost up three per cent.
4. Five men added.

D. Comparison with other cities

II. What can be done about rising costs of fire protection?

A. Tie costs to assessed value of property in city.

1. City manager explains funding plan.
2. City assessor discusses property values.

This is followed with a sample of the way the story may be written for publication.

Several exercises are given in Structuring Notes, which combines a handout with in-class note work.

Another handout dealing with the Major Profile is called Structuring the Profile and essentially reviews the material on checking facts, condensing and organizing, gap-detecting and working with the inverted pyramid or the modified news feature structures.

Structuring the Feature discusses organization forms but cautions that separating feature stories from news stories is misleading. The handout says: "The two are actually on a continuum. The difference really is in emphasis. Both types of stories require focus, a central point. The reader still must be able to summarize the point of the story. But the writing may require

that he read further to fully understand the point. In the straight news story the point is given immediately. Of course, this means the writer must sustain interest for a longer period of time."

In all the exercises and assignments, we stress that, once the students' stories are organized into a useable form, the writing or elaborating or linking of the elements of the structure becomes a natural follow-through. The data are already in words and all that is necessary is to unify the material into a coherent whole.

News Styling

The steps in this process include story treatment, story writing and story editing. After the students organize their gathered material into an appropriate form, they are instructed to consider in what manner can they best express to their readers what they have assembled. Structuring aids the decision on whether the story should be a straight news report, a feature or a combination news feature. In making this decision, we suggest that the student try for a lead that will fit the sum of his gathered material. In many cases, we say, the lead will point to the kind of story the student should write.

We promote the idea of good writing, writing of literary quality. Examples of excellent news writing are passed out and discussed. We also bring into the class instructors from the university's Writer's Workshop who talk about the aesthetics of writing and about how they work to achieve quality in their output.

In some of the assignments, we stress descriptive/anecdotal writing and story-telling. Short stories are offered as models of literary effort that can be put into news writing. We hope in this way to inspire the talented ones to try for the neat phrase and the moving sentence. Some of it may also rub off on the less talented ones.

Experience drawn from other beginning reporting classes suggests that real writing talent may be limited to a small proportion of the students enrolled. The use of the outline in structuring, we feel, helps students of varying writing abilities to learn how to arrange their material into informative sets so that when they write their stories in the inverted pyramid style or some variation of that the outcome is a competent and readable report. The talented ones add their own word-use flair and come up with the most interesting stories.[5]

The encoding or writing process, of course, means working with words in meaningful forms and in contextual relationships. This also means editing out redundancies, replacing passive terms with active ones and rephrasing for effectiveness.

Learning to write is actually learning to rewrite and this factor is heavily pushed. Rewriting assignments generally follow each writing assignment.

Editing is the final operation before the copy is released for publication. Students are taught to go over their copy, once again checking for accuracy, rechecking the completeness of the story, reviewing the presentation/effect or writing and, finally, checking the language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.) and the style.[6]

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[5]Support for this viewpoint has come from a number of editors who have visited the Iowa campus. In discussing what they look for in reporters, the common response is people who know how to dig for news material and how to put it together in readable form. One recent visitor noted that he is "always on the lookout for the nifty writer," but there aren't too many. "I'll take the damned good bird-dog reporter. We have rewrites."

[6]The AP Stylebook is the guide we use.

The styling assignments are tied into the gathering and structuring assignments. For instance, the assignment on gathering material for the Radio Profile is followed by Structuring the Profile and then by Styling the Profile.

Other styling assignments, which cap gathering and organizing, include Covering the Iowa City Schools, Statistical Profile, Writing Up the Results of a Pay CATV Poll, Covering a Story for the Daily Iowan (university daily), Covering City Hall, Covering City Council Meeting, Covering District Court Criminal Trial.

The final styling assignments appear as final examinations. The first one involves doing a special section for the campus daily. The special section is for freshman students and new comers to the campus and involves stories of student, faculty and administrative organizations.

The second one involves the Iowa City newspaper, the Press-Citizen. Students cover and write stories on assignments provided by the editors of the paper.

There is stress in the course on getting students' work into print. Constant in-class exercises and rewrites have a deleterious effect on students. They lose the sense of publication and the aiming of their work for an audience. The need to put students' copy into print in order to let them see what it looks like in a newspaper page becomes imperative.

Besides the final styling assignments, we managed to get the students' copy into type in several ways. One involved coverage of talks by visiting news people. When one particularly controversial Iowa publisher appeared, we assigned the students to research the man and his newspaper and then cover his talk, given to the general public. The best four stories were offered to the Daily Iowan, campus paper, for final selection by the news editors. The story that was finally chosen was given pretty good play and bylined.

Another way was to select the 10 or so best stories that resulted from the Major Profiles. These were packaged as a series and offered to the Daily Iowan.

A third way came with the Coverage of Iowa City Schools. Twenty of the best stories were offered to the editor of the Iowa City Press-Citizen for use. He used several of them. This same set of stories were also given to the superintendent of schools to use as he wished. He planned to publish them for community distribution.

The fourth copy-into-print opportunity came when the editor of the Daily Iowan invited our students to do stories on assignment. Two class sessions were devoted to covering these assignments and writing stories. The stories appeared over a period of two weeks, the better ones with bylines. But all the students saw their efforts in print.

Additional opportunity came with the city hall and city council assignments, with the court coverage and with an assignment that involved a poll of Iowa City residents on the topic of pay cable television.

Students were given a Public Opinion Survey Handout which outlined a survey for Iowa City. Included with the framework was a Questionnaire Flow Chart, which helped in framing useful questions and in eliminating duplicating and unnecessary questions. This was climaxed with a worked-out Pay CATV Telephone Questionnaire which stressed brevity and pertinence. Students were shown again how it pays to prepare for research and how specific questions get specific and measurable answers.

The poll assignment was divided into two parts. In the first part, students studied the background work, participated in interviewer training and in-class and J-School pretest, received the names and numbers to call (about

seven to eight per student), the calling times and, finally, the delivery time for the completed questionnaires.

The second part involved a review of what was done, an explanation and discussion of data interpretation, the need for backgrounding the issue from documentary sources, and then the writing of a survey story, with a five-W lead and straight news story body.

One final aspect was added, cross-tabulation. Students were shown how depth could be provided through cross-tabulating the results, using demographics and sectioning.

Other styling efforts concerned the broadcast style. Six class sessions were devoted to familiarization with the radio news style. The purpose was to show some contrast and also to suggest how students might simplify their leads by adopting the keep-it-conversational, keep-it-simple edict of the broadcast news writers.

CONCLUSION

The heavy emphasis on digging and structuring showed good results in the work of the students. The editor of the local paper was impressed by the students' devotion to "mining" documents and records and by their preparation for interviews.

One of the administrators involved in the Major Profiles claimed that the student who showed up to interview him knew more about him than he did himself, adding: "She even read my master's thesis."

In student appraisal of the course, the sum of the remarks was expressed this way by one of the class members:

"This class has been intense, possibly too intense at times, but I learned a lot. I feel like I'm receiving some usable skills, more useful than what

I learn in most of my other classes.

"The problem for me has been covering too much material in such a short time....I think the most important thing I have learned this semester is that, in journalism, writing isn't really the key as much as is research and coming across to people. The way you get the information you write about is the most important thing you do."

We admit to pushing the students harder and faster than is normally done in a beginning course. But we believe that the rigor contributed to the learning rate of the students.

This deadline pressure, the stress on hard gathering of data, the systemizing of the process of data order and organization and, finally, the push for depth writing have, we believe, placed these students in a forward position. We feel they are better prepared for the courses that follow and for the careers that they set for themselves for the future.

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